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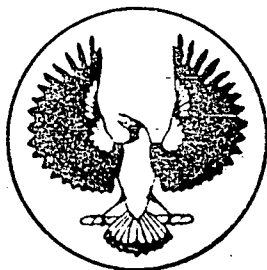
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Title:

Statement: Delay in agreement for Riverland fruitgrowers

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STATEMENT

from the Premier

Date 24th December 1976

Embargo.....

State Administration Centre,
Victoria Square, Adelaide,
South Australia 5001
227 2688

The Acting Premier, Mr. Corcoran, said today he was extremely disappointed that the Board of the Riverland Cannery had chosen to delay once again accepting the agreement which would have given Riverland fruitgrowers \$165,000 straight away.

"The Board's decision is hard to understand.

"On Monday of this week the Board indicated it would accept the agreement between the South Australian Industries Assistance Corporation and the Cannery subject to modification of three clauses. Those changes were made to the Cannery's satisfaction by Wednesday and it was anticipated that, the SAIAC having agreed to those changes, the Cannery would sign the agreement speedily so that growers would be able to get their payments before Christmas.

"Quite frankly, I am very surprised that the Cannery Board has now rejected this agreement after a requisitioned meeting of around 200 shareholders on November 12 expressly instructed the Board to accept the South Australian Government's offer in total.

"The Government at the time of announcing its conversion of its half of the loan to a grant said that it wanted the SAIAC to look into the whole industry because the SAIAC is a commercially oriented and independent body which will be able to greatly assist the canning fruit industry.

"The Government's decision to refer the matter to the SAIAC was welcomed throughout the industry as a positive initiative and as a means of securing long term solutions to what have been endemic problems.

Over Page ...

"The Cannery Board has deliberately delayed and procrastinated over this whole issue. The Government has wanted to get things done speedily so that the growers - the people who are facing serious cash-flow problems - got the benefits of our actions as quickly as possible.

"The Board seems to be ignoring the express wishes of the growers and is acting, in my mind, quite irresponsibly in attempting to drag out this matter still further.

"The Board late yesterday afternoon told the Government it wanted to redraft the agreement and that it would discuss the changes 'within the next few days'. This is just another time wasting tactic.

"The SAIAC has, over the past few weeks, worked out a good arrangement with the Cannery Board and the SAIAC has been flexible and prepared to compromise. Officers of the SAIAC have been in Berri most of this week to be available to explain and discuss the agreement.

"It isn't possible to start the whole process again, as the Cannery Board wants.

"There is nothing unusual in any terms of the agreement including the provision of SAIAC directors on the Board. The Corporation in the past has given financial and technical help to a wide range of businesses in South Australia who have welcomed the Corporation's involvement at their Board level and who have been very thankful for the expertise the SAIAC Board members have brought to the organisation.

"The Cannery Board's delaying tactics have become so blatant and so obviously political that the situation may soon be reached that the South Australian Government may have to seriously consider withdrawing its offer to convert its share of the loan and will seek repayment of the loan within the terms of the previous conditions.

"It is quite clear that some of the Board members are determined to put their own political interests ahead of the needs of the growers. Proof of the way the Board is prepared to play politics in this matter is in its decision to invite two Liberal members of Parliament to last night's general meeting, - but to exclude a South Australian Labor Senator, Geoff McLaren. Senator McLaren, who represents all South Australians and who has done much to help the people in the Riverland, was excluded on the flimsiest of pretences which will not hide the Board's political role".



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